

# Millcreek Junior High School 245 East 1000 South Bountiful, Utah 84010

November 15-16, 2006



Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

# THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

## Millcreek Junior High School 245 East 1000 South Bountiful, Utah 84010

November 15-16, 2006

## UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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#### **FOREWORD**

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, November 15-16, 2006, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Millcreek Junior High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the visiting team. The excellent leadership given by Principal David Tanner is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Millcreek Junior High School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Millcreek Junior High School.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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## MILLCREEK JUNIOR. HIGH SCHOOL

## ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

## **School Administration**

David Tanner	Principal
Holly Jorgensen	
Ed Campbell	1

## Counseling

Linda Cook	Counselor
Diane Schaefer	Counselor

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Marcia Birdsley	Jodi Miller	Merilee Thacker
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## MILLCREEK JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

At Millcreek Junior High we focus on learning by providing effective instruction and promoting student accountability and success.

## **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

- 1. Student learning should be the primary focus of all decisions made at our school.
- 2. Students learn content in different ways and should be provided with a variety of challenging instructional approaches.
- 3. All students can learn to be good citizens and learn to demonstrate accountability, mutual respect and integrity.
- 4. Students learn best in a safe and caring environment.
- 5. Students learn best in a physically comfortable facility.
- 6. Parents, school staff, and community share in the responsibility for educating our students.

## MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Catherine Jensen, Sunset Ridge Middle School, Jordan School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Jane Adams, Mount Logan Middle School, Logan School District

Debby Herget, Oquirrh Hills Middle School, Jordan District

Dan Barney, South Ogden Middle School, Weber School District

#### VISITING TEAM REPORT

## MILLCREEK JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

**CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE** 

Millcreek Junior High School opened in the fall of 1967 with nearly 650 students and 18 teachers. The student population was mostly Caucasian, with upper- to middle-income patrons. In the fall of 1981 a realignment of boundaries took place, and over time the population has become more diverse, yet is still ninety percent Caucasian. In the fall of 1991, Millcreek began grade-level teaming. A concerted effort was made in the following years to decrease classroom interruptions. This "focus on learning" eventually became the formal theme in 1995. The school follows more of a junior high model than middle school model, with athletic teams, cheerleaders, and auditioned groups. Students attend a traditional seven-period day. The school has also added a magnet International Baccalaureate program for honors students from the entire district.

The school draws students from Bountiful and Woods Cross. Millcreek services a more diverse, less affluent population than the total communities in which it resides. The boundaries cut a swath from the Wasatch Mountains on the east side to the edges of the Great Salt Lake on the west, so there is a variation in socioeconomic standing. About 24 percent of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

The following significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile:

- Performance data on standardized tests indicates the school consistently performs above the national and district averages, with a slightly upward trend
- The demographics of the school show almost a 90 percent Caucasian population.
- Survey results show that all stakeholder groups (students, parents, and teachers) are satisfied with the school. Interestingly, the staff gave the school the lowest scores.
- Disaggregation of the data shows significant achievement gaps for English language learners and students with disabilities. These gaps are being addressed by the school.

- Hispanic students are achieving at lower levels than their Caucasian counterparts on the CRT exams.
- More than fifty percent of the students average "A" grades in their classes. Less than 10 percent average grades of D or F. The percentage of failing grades in 7<sup>th</sup> grade English is significantly higher than any other core subject at any other grade level.
- b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

Millcreek Junior High School is commended for its excellent effort to collect and analyze data. The school is encouraged to refine the process of data collection and distribution. The purpose of data collection is to determine who is and who is not learning, and make informed decisions in order to increase learning for individuals and groups of students. Care should be taken to collect data that reflects learning, and not merely program implementation. As the school gains experience with data collection and management, it is encouraged to develop common assessments that can be given frequently with the purpose of informing and adjusting instructional practices rather than sorting and describing kids. The data can be the information used to determine effectiveness of teaching and improve learning.

## **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- Continuing inquiry into reading achievement data is recommended. The school has set a goal of increasing reading ability, yet relies on the end-of-course language arts exams for the data on that achievement. Assessments should be implemented in order to gain knowledge about current reading ability and improvement through the implementation of reading strategies programs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school disaggregate the achievement data of the magnet honors students from the whole school data in order to get a more realistic picture of student learning.
- The school is encouraged to collect data on participation in co-curricular and extracurricular activities and clubs. One of the tenets of middle level philosophy is providing a venue for each student to feel part of something special in the school. Care should be taken that the number of programs offered that require audition or special selection is balanced by the number of programs that are not selective in nature, yet are still attractive to the students.
- The school is encouraged to develop a method of data collection for implementation and progress on the DRSLs.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS**

a) To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?

The Visiting Team commends Millcreek Junior High School for its engagement in the self-study process. The school completed every aspect of "Collaborating for Student Achievement" over the past two years, developing a mission, beliefs, and DRSLs. Departments have completed a reflective analysis of current practices and suggested areas of improvement. Organizational effectiveness has been evaluated through seven focus groups comprised of all stakeholder groups. Participating parents and students valued the experience of being included and felt their voices were being heard. The self-study process has been facilitated by teacher-leaders under the direction of the school administration. All major aspects of the self-study process have been collaboratively completed.

b) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

Millcreek Junior High School's self-study is a careful study of the work of the school community. It is an honest look at the school's current reality. During the site visit, the Visiting Team determined the actual printed document to be a very humble representation of the actual complexion of the school. The surveys showed the staff to give themselves lower marks than any of the other stakeholder groups. This is quite unusual, yet it reflects the staff's commitment to excellence and continuous improvement. They seem not to be satisfied with current reality, but reaching for what might be. Many positive aspects of the school were discovered by the Visiting Team during the site visit that were not reported in the document. The Visiting Team commends the staff members for their commitment to continual improvement through the reflective and collaborative self-study process. The Visiting Team encourages the school to continue the process by critically assessing instructional practices, policies, and procedures on behalf of student learning.

## CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Millcreek Junior High School's desired results for student learning are as follows:

When students leave Millcreek Junior High, they will be able to:

- 1. Apply problem-solving strategies to a variety of academic situations as well as real-life challenges.
- 2. Gather information and ideas through use of reading strategies.
- 3. Communicate effectively.

## Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

a) To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?

After carefully researching existing mission statements and developing a shared vision of student learning and success, a team of teachers met in groups to construct a formal mission statement. Three drafts of the mission statement were written and presented to administration, faculty, parents, and students for evaluation and feedback. After further revision, a mission statement was constructed that provides a unified sense of direction and purpose for the school. It is definitely the product of a collaborative effort representing all stakeholders. The mission statement is used school-wide as a guide for effectively planning purposeful activities for students as well as individual lesson plans.

b) To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?

The key aspects of student learning and success were defined and used as a springboard for developing the school's belief statements. These statements directly reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success, as evidenced by the programs, instruction, activities, and general atmosphere in the school. Students are rewarded for academic achievement and good citizenship. Honors classes are available, and tutoring and remediation services are offered those who need additional help. All students are provided with opportunities to discover and develop innate talents and abilities. An atmosphere of respect for diversity and individuality is fostered. All stakeholders work collaboratively to improve student performance.

c) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?

The mission and belief statements, which are focused on learning, are in complete alignment with the school's DRSLs. Student learning will result in students being able to communicate effectively, gather and evaluate information, and apply problem-solving strategies to real-life situations. At Millcreek Jr. High, reading strategies are taught across the curriculum and the entire school participates in silent sustained reading each day. The Six Traits of Writing are used to teach students to express ideas and feelings. Oral presentations allow students the

opportunity to develop verbal skills. The focus on reading and writing prepares students to communicate effectively with others. Teachers demonstrate the connection between concepts taught in the classroom and real-life situations. Students are taught to identify a problem and determine which strategies would be most effective in solving the problem. These are examples of how the DRSLs are integrated into classroom instruction.

## **Curriculum Development:**

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?

Each department at Millcreek Junior High School works at a high level to align its curriculum with the Utah Core and the Davis Educational Skills of Knowledge (D.E.S.K.). Curriculum maps are being developed and updated to bridge communication between departments and across curricular areas. There is a genuine atmosphere of collegiality among the faculty, staff, and administration.

Although the small size of the faculty and student body enhances collaborative efforts, it is the commitment and vision of the staff and administration toward the common goal of focused learning that makes collaboration work.

During weekly early release time, the staff rotates meetings among departments, teams, professional development, and (for the past two years) accreditation. Each grade level functions as a team, with teachers planning cross-curricular activities, recognition for all students, supportive mentoring for at-risk students, and coordinated assignments to avoid a homework overload.

Students feel that all teachers are serious about the mission of the school to focus on learning and the commitment to hold all students accountable for the same standards. Students are very aware of and comfortable with the high degree of collaboration and communication between teachers, as it translates to both academic and social goals for achievement.

Parents and students expressed appreciation for the efforts of the staff to meet the needs of all students at the school. Both groups are in strong agreement that they not only feel welcome, but that the atmosphere is friendly, engaging, and safe. There is also a strong sense of trust among the staff, parents, and students. There is some concern that honors classes may need some review and attention.

b) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?

Collaboration is a high priority at this school. The teaching staff is in the process of focusing curricula on the school's desired results for student learning in team, department, and individual educator goals. The three DRSLs for the school are clear and applicable to all curricula. The teaching staff should continue to clarify indicators and assessments. Most teachers post daily objectives to identify expectations.

## **Quality Instructional Design:**

a) To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?

Students feel that teachers focus on learning and making learning fun. Teachers collaborate within grade level teams to create diverse learning opportunities for students. Team field trips, projects, and activities support learning. According to the focus group report, 85 percent of teachers use a variety of teaching approaches daily in their classes. Teachers establish positive learning environments in their classrooms and include lecture, small group work, lab work, cooperative learning, individual deduction, drama presentations, graphic organizers, peer tutors, and new technology.

b) To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?

The staff continually participates in professional development that affects instructional strategies and learning. The teaching staff as a whole elected to take ESL endorsement classes when the need for more ESL-endorsed teachers arose. ESL teachers support students in learning material from mainstream teachers. Reading and writing instruction across the curriculum is being implemented. Teachers who are adept at getting students to use higher-order thinking skills are encouraged to share knowledge and strategies with other teachers. The small size of the staff facilitates such collaboration.

c) To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?

Teachers, counselors, and administrators continually identify students who need additional time on task, remediation, or skill improvement, and provide opportunities to support learning through a variety of resources, including afterschool tutoring. Each teacher on a team selects three or four students to whom they will give extra support, and then finds a time to meet with them. Students feel strongly that opportunities for academic and social success are readily available to every student in the school.

## **Quality Assessment Systems:**

a) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?

Student achievement is at the forefront of consideration by the staff at Millcreek Junior High School. The teachers are very dedicated to student success; however, it is noticeable that the assessment systems currently in use are not fully developed. The staff is making an effort to align assessment departmentally, but it is not evident that assessment systems exist to show a definite shared vision of successful student learning. The school does demonstrate a shared vision of learning focus. It is the belief of the Visiting Team that this school will develop an understanding of quality assessments, and will place them in to use so that students and parents will know what is expected of students and how it should look

The next step is to develop common assessments to ensure consistent learning within the department regardless of the individual teacher. Common assessments can be used to inform instructional practice and thereby increase overall student achievement.

b) To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?

The school has identified the need for assessments of student learning. Assessments are directly linked to specific instructional uses that promote student achievement. However, it should be noted that the Visiting Team believes that the use of *quality* assessments is emerging and needs to be continually planned and restructured to become consistent with interpretation and purpose as a complete school function,

c) To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?

The selected method of student learning seems fair and looks to be based on the type of instruction in individual classroom circumstances. This Visiting Team believes that the manner of assessment will continue to be fair and that the staff at Millcreek Jr. High School will continue to work diligently to create an equitable assessment system.

## **Leadership for School Improvement:**

a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?

The school leadership promotes quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning. The school has a long tradition of "focusing on learning." In fact, "focusing on learning" was adopted as the school motto almost twenty years ago. The leadership and teachers base decisions on their impact on student learning. Instructional time is protected, with interruptions and entertainment activities kept to a minimum. Each lesson in each class each day is centered on a learning objective explicitly stated to the students and related to the learning activities. Students and staff members feel valued and important. Efforts are made by the school to honor the work of the students and staff. The school is encouraged to continue to explore current research-based best practices that provide academic rigor and real-world relevance.

b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?

The decision-making process at Millcreek Junior High School is collaborative and provides opportunities for the meaningful involvement of the school's stakeholders. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students participated in the focus groups. The input of each group was important to giving an accurate description of the reality of the school and making plans for future improvement. Decisions regarding the day-to-day operation of the school are made based on alignment with "focusing on learning." The school leadership is working to implement research-based best practices. Professional development and quality teaching time is dedicated to exploration of research-based best practices. The decision-making process is collaborative and provides opportunities for the meaningful involvement of the school's stakeholders.

c) To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?

The Visiting Team commends the school leadership for its initial efforts to monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness. The overall self-study has been shown to be reflective of the work of the school on behalf of students. Effort should be given to the development of an assessment system based on Core Curriculum standards that can be used diagnostically during the year in order to reveal gaps in achievement and inform instructional practice before the CRTs, which serves more as an autopsy of what the students did not learn. The same should begin for the DRSLs. This will ensure a model of continuous improvement through "plan, implement, evaluate, and revise."

d) To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?

The Visiting Team commends the leadership for school-wide policies and operational procedures that are consistent with the school's beliefs and mission, and which are designed to maximize opportunities for successful learning. The visit validated the "focus on learning" as pervasive throughout the school. The students and parents feel school is a safe place where the leadership and teachers care about them. Behavioral expectations for students are clear and consistent. Students report that teachers and administrators respond quickly and efficiently to inappropriate behaviors that interrupt learning. As the next step, the school is encouraged to begin an in-depth study of the characteristics of high-performing middle-level schools in order to better meet the developmental needs of early adolescent learners.

e) To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?

The school leadership makes decisions related to the allocation and use of resources based on its "focus on learning." The DRSLs are fairly recent, with the school just beginning the work of determining quality indicators and expected levels of performance. All departments have reviewed current practice for attention to the DRSLs through the reflective departmental analysis. Interviews indicate a strong commitment to effective implementation of the DRSLs and alignment of all improvement efforts.

f) To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?

The Visiting Team commends the school leadership for the participation of the school community in student learning. The parent groups and students love their school, teachers, and administration. When given the opportunity to express ways to improve the school, both students and parents struggled to make suggestions. Parents work in partnership with the school for student learning. The school has a long tradition of being the parents' "school of choice." Members of the school community feel their voices are heard and their input valued.

## **Community Building:**

a) To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?

It is clearly evident that this school has fostered and continues to foster working, community-building relationships within the school. "Productive" and "positive" may be understatements in commenting on the level of success with which Millcreek Jr. High School has developed and continues to develop its nurturing

environment within the school. The level of positive community participation inside the school is enormous. It is evident that the school has interdependent teams that continually work to achieve all of the goals of the school

b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

The school engages parents, families, and local business as partners to help build the learning process. There is evidence of productive links between the school and the community that enhance opportunities for student support and achievement. The Visiting Team has no doubt that these partnering networks will continue to exist and be strengthened as the school community demonstrates continued need and success.

## **Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:**

a) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?

Members of the faculty at Millcreek Jr. High are constantly evaluating their instructional practices to determine what they could do to improve their teaching and create an environment conducive to learning in their classrooms. The entire faculty participates in professional development opportunities. When faculty members meet in grade level teams, they follow up on the results of their efforts to implement the strategies and skills learned in seminars, workshops, and other training sessions. They are committed to learning and applying techniques that will result in higher levels of student learning and achievement.

b) To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

The administration provides ample opportunities for professional development at the school. The faculty has participated collectively in training sessions on the Six Traits of Writing, graphic organizers, reading strategies, creating rubrics, best practices, backward design, and ESL training, among others. The administration provides funds and meals for teachers who participate in training sessions on site. Time has been allotted teachers to work on curriculum mapping and other activities learned in professional development sessions. School-wide meetings are kept to a minimum to allow teachers time to participate in workshops. Resources are provided at school to assist in the implementation of practices and strategies taught in professional development classes.

# CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

Millcreek Junior High School is not seeking accreditation through Northwest Association of Accredited Schools. Most Utah public junior high /middle schools are not accredited through NAAS but only by the USOE – it is their choice to join NAAS or not.

## CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

a) To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?

The school has made an honest effort to create an action plan to drive school improvement. With some revisions, the school-wide action plan is adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up. The school Visiting Team suggests the school review the plan to ensure each goal is a "SMART" goal: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound. The action plan should be reviewed and revised to "focus on student learning." Action steps may include program implementation, but those programs must be assessed for their impact on student learning rather than just recorded as accomplished. The school is encouraged to review and revise the plan, with increased student achievement as the measurement tool.

b) To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?

The culture of continuous improvement is strong in the school. The Visiting Team is confident there is sufficient commitment to making necessary revisions to the action plan and then following through.

c) How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school-wide action plan appear to be?

The Visiting Team suggests the school revise the school-wide action plan, as previously stated, to include SMART goals focusing on student achievement with measurable targets and time-bound action steps. The school improvement process should continue as the action plan is revised and implemented. The school should continue to be reflective and collaborative. It must accurately describe the current reality, describe what would be ideal, and continue to show commitment to the plan.

# CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

## **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends the Millcreek Junior High School staff for its commitment to the self-study and continuous improvement, and for its dedication to doing whatever it takes on behalf of students.
- The Visiting Team commends the administrative leadership team for their passion for middle level education, care for students, empowerment of staff, and inclusion of community in the workings of the school.
- The Visiting Team commends the school for creating a culture of learning where students feel welcomed and safe, where trust and caring are apparent, where parents "choose" to have their children attend, and where academic and behavioral expectations are high.
- The Visiting Team commends the school for extending the school to the community through business partnerships, cooperation with community agencies and resources, participation of parents, and a strong history of positive school traditions.

## **Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school work to improve the quality and effectiveness of data collection. This may include cohort group scores, data about instructional practices and their effectiveness, and disaggregation of the magnet honors program.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school review and revise the action plan for alignment with the findings of the self-study. The goals should be SMART goals with specific steps focused on improving student achievement.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school develop a quality assessment system in order to inform and adjust instructional practices rather than sort and describe kids. Common assessments will help ensure consistency in curricula across all classrooms.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school explore and implement research-based best practices for middle-level learners that are focused on academic excellence for each and every student, social equity, and developmental responsiveness. The school should work to keep learning as the constant, with time and support the variables.